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Weldon, Bill

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Considerations for Higher Education Systems in Post-Communist Societies: A Current Look at Czech Higher Education

BILL WELDON*

Charles University, Prague

Abstract: The current state of Czech higher education can only be understood in the context of the overall state of education and the Czech nation. It could best be described at this time as being in a state of flux. The conditions deserving scholarly attention are centred on several themes. There are issues of concern in the areas of curriculum design, particularly the ideas for the integration of the Academy of Sciences and the university, public and private education, secondary and tertiary education, and within the tertiary level itself. Other important issues include instructional methods in the classrooms of higher education, the accessibility of the tertiary education system, the funding of institutions of higher education, the Czech Republic's entry into the European Union, and the issue of educational leadership.

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Introduction

Languishing in the aftermath of forty years under communism, the status of Czech education has been described as confused and in a state of flux. The communist past has deeply influenced higher education in the Czech Republic and its grip upon principle and practice has been stronger than many of the educators who were interviewed in this study had thought.

Curriculum and instruction need to be modernised and educational policy, structure, and leadership need to be reformed. However, the lack of educational funding puts the outcomes of any serious attempts at reform in serious doubt.

Education is intimately tied to culture. One of the first questions to be addressed in education is *what is its purpose*. The answer to this question sets all programmes, funding and assessment in place. What is the purpose of education in the Czech Republic? Is it to prepare people for the workplace? Is it to acculturate people? Is it to teach people the country's language? Is it to teach social skills? Is the purpose of education to create life-long learners? Does the purpose of education include all of the aforementioned goals?

* Direct all correspondence to: Bill Weldon, PhD., e-mail: bill@wldon.com

Before an effective system of education can be achieved, the question *where is the society going* must be fully addressed and answered, as it no doubt has been in the Czech Republic. Therefore, the current state of Czech higher education can only be understood in the context of the overall state of education and the nation.

Czech higher education needs a champion. Within it there exists an apparent ambiguity of leadership. Leadership by committee, like a Rectors Conference, or leadership by influence, like some individual educators, is muddled in a confusion based on a lack of clearly defined leadership principles.

The future of the Czech Republic includes entry into the European Union (EU). There will be a need for a more global contextualisation of effective, efficient higher education. A nation like the Czech Republic cannot survive in isolation, and neither can the EU. The world of today is a global economy, where commerce, culture and communications are so integrated that knowledge accessibility is critical to successful national economies. Entry into the EU will most likely be a great boon to the Czech Republic. The potential for an integrated, mutually beneficial relationship should be an encouragement to the Czech citizenry.

Changes are needed in the higher education system, some of them immediate, and others that need more time to be accomplished. Often it is heard that the educational concepts of forty years of communism cannot be easily turned around. True, but there must be some validity to the fact that thirteen years have passed since the end of the communist era in the Czech Republic, and in comparison this era has hardly accomplished what the communists were able to accomplish in their first thirteen years. Totalitarian repressive regimes may be highly effective in implementing change; however, the change is not based on the will of the populace but rather on what the *perceived* needs of a collective state are.

As Machiavelli noted, "... it ought to be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things. Because the innovator has for enemies all those who have done well under the old conditions and lukewarm defenders in those who may do well under the new."¹

Considerations, methodology, and delimitations

Why should any non-Czech write an article on Czech higher education? Sometimes, insights from people outside the system can add information valuable to those who work within the system and who are charged with the responsibility of managing its day-to-day outcomes. Often an outside voice, unfamiliar with the history, politics, and personalities of a particular area, can add, in a somewhat removed way, perceptions unlikely to be seen by those within it. An understanding not perceived to

¹ *The Prince* by Niccolò Machiavelli, Chapter 6.

Table 1. People interviewed

| | | |
|-----|---------------------|---|
| 1 | Beneš, Josef | Director of Higher Education – Ministry of Education |
| 2 | Hošek, Pavel | Acting Academic Dean at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Prague |
| 3. | Hoza, Ignác | Rector – Military University of the Ground Forces in Vyškov Czech Republic |
| 4. | Jařab, Josef | Former rector at Palacky University in Olomouc, former Rector of the CEU in Budapest, and currently a Czech senator |
| 5. | Jiráček, Jan | Pro-Dean – Social Sciences Faculty in Prague |
| 6. | Kotásek, Jiří | Former head of the Institute for Research and Development of Education and an expert on Czech higher education as a part of comparative educational systems |
| 7. | Kymlová, Hanka | Fourth year student at the Institute of Chemical Technology |
| 8. | Matějů, Petr | Institute of Sociology, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and Vice-President for Research, the Anglo-American Institute for Liberal Studies, Prague |
| 9. | Pehe, Jiří | Director – New York University – Prague |
| 10. | Raus, Pavel | Clinical Psychology – Head of an NGO |
| 11. | Ripková, Hanka | Director of the Fulbright Commission in the Czech Republic |
| 12. | Šebková, Helena | Director – Center for Higher Education Studies |
| 13. | Sokol, Jan | Dean – Faculty of Humanistic Studies – Charles University |
| 14. | Spilková, Vladimíra | Department Chair, early childhood and elementary education – Charles University |
| 15. | Stránský, Martin | Editor of <i>The New Presence</i> a top magazine on Central European Affairs |
| 16. | Walterová, Eliška | Director – The Institute for Research and Development of Education |
| 17. | Wilhelm, Ivan | Rector – Charles University |
| 18. | Young, Mitchell | Vice-President for Academic Affairs – the Anglo-American Institute for Liberal Studies, Prague |
| 19. | Zieleniecová, Pavla | Director, Institute for Information on Education |
| 20. | Zlatuška, Jiří | Rector – Masaryk University in Brno – currently a Czech senator |

be based on reality could be quickly ignored. Yet, an educational researcher can often see the educational problems more clearly than those who face them daily.

Twenty interviews were conducted over a period between October 2002 and February 2003. Eight questions were asked of various educators who had agreed to an interview (See Table 1).

Table 2. The interview questions on Czech higher education

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | In your words, describe the current state of higher education in the Czech Republic. |
| 2 | What has caused this to happen? |
| 3 | Who are the educational leaders (formal and informal) in the Czech Republic? |
| 4 | How will the Czech Republic's inevitable entry into the EU affect Czech Higher Education? |
| 5 | What three things should be done NOW to improve Higher Education in the Czech Republic? |
| 6 | What are two long-range ideas for the improvement in Higher Education? |
| 7 | Can I use your name and/or position in the article? If so how? |
| 8 | What other questions would you ask that I did not ask and how would you answer them? |

The average length of an interview was one and a half hours. All interviews were conducted in English and on only one occasion was an interpreter used. All persons interviewed were informed of the intent of the interview, that being to collect information with the purpose of writing an article on Czech higher education. While most of those interviewed were from Prague, 24% were from other locations in the Czech Republic.

Some natural limitations occurred in the research. Language was a problem, as nuances could not be fully comprehended. Czech academic language and jargon limited comprehension within the context of the interview itself. All other information was accessible in English. Referrals were used as the interviewees were asked to identify leaders in Czech higher education.

A current look at Czech higher education and the issues it evokes

While the interviewees expressed different opinions of the state of higher education in the Czech Republic, one common theme emerged: Czech higher education is not in a positive state. Responses to the question, 'In your own words describe the current state of higher education in the Czech Republic', brought forth a variety of responses.

In the responses, concerns were expressed over the process or rate of change: "...even with the reforms of the last ten years, the system is far from being reformed sufficiently" (Kotásek); "...very old but change is occurring ever so slowly" (Hoza); "Too many remnants from the Communist past – expected change to be more rapid" (Zlatuška); "...state of flux with everyone having expected the speed of changes to be much faster" (Ripková); "...it is larger but not improved/ it is still not a priority" (Jařab); and "...not enough change has been made" (Zieleniecová).

There were also comments that reflected a neither positive nor negative state, but merely offered an observation of higher education's current condition. Such were the comments of Sokol, "it is growing slowly," Kotásek, "...not as broad as in the West," and Pehe, "it is in a state of flux".

One other response seemed worthy of special consideration. Šebková noted, "Czech Republic higher education should be careful not to be blinded by pride.... We should be thinking balance and looking for harmonisation and convergence.... Compared to other EU countries Czechs are okay". Harmony and convergence would always be preferable to discord and divergence, but how does one achieve these two elusive concepts? Are Czechs okay compared to other EU countries?

Some ideas to consider are:

- A. The tertiary educational system needs to be restructured or renovated. After a review of the system, a comparative study presenting an impartial view, the government should then make education a priority.
- B. There seems to be a problematic 'disconnection' in the Czech higher education system. One solution offered is to 'connect the dots' and see the big picture (Hoza). This implies, at the least, that the component parts for a successful, efficient system may be present, but no one appears to be looking at the system as a whole.

Issues of curriculum

There are many issues concerning a structured degree approach to curriculum. Historically, a mindset exists in the Czech Republic that the master's degree is the terminal degree. Anything less than a *magistr* is not considered acceptable. As tertiary education is not paid for by the students but rather by the state, students that have been able to gain entrance into study have developed a view of 'no personal ownership' in the acquisition of the degree. The suppositional basis from which this works is that the state pays for the education of the students and then the students in turn work in jobs that are beneficial to the state and the society. Degree programmes and curriculum were established to meet this suppositional goal, which was an underlying principal stemming from the Soviet educational system.

Changing an educational structure can be done through legislation, but changing the mindset of a culture is more difficult. The bachelor's degree will not be accepted in the culture until a valid reason for its existence has been established. This validation should come from the business community, where most university graduates go after finishing their tertiary degree. The question needs to be asked, are those students who are graduating from Czech tertiary education with a bachelor's degree capable of active participation in the Czech labour market? In addition, are the students with a master's degree performing in the same labour market at a level appreciably superior to the students with a bachelor's degree, so that the need for the former is substantially preferable to the latter? Furthermore, at what point is the

cost to the state for the producing a student with a master's degree readily demonstrated in a difference between the productive output value of one who holds a master's rather than a bachelor's degree?

The integration of Czech higher education into the EU system, as set out in the Bologna Declaration,² clearly establishes the need for and insistence upon a three-level tertiary system. The Czech higher education law of 1998 is in alignment with that concept.

The tertiary degree process becomes a 3+2+3 design and conforms to most tertiary systems of education. The 3+2 design was seen as important by a number of the educators who were interviewed (Hoza, Šebková, Spilková, Sokol, Wilhelm); they also recognised the importance of the bachelor's degree as a practical way to address the problem of access to the tertiary system. Wilhelm alluded to this when he stated, "We need to finalise the structure of the three degrees towards accessibility for a larger number of students." Sokol was more specific when he stated, "Push more to the division of study of 3+2 and have more students in bachelor's programmes."

The current distribution of students in tertiary education reveals that 17% are enrolled in bachelor's degree programmes, 5% in a 'short' master's programme (after Bc), 71% in a 'long' master's programme, and 7% in PhD programmes.³ The ideal would be more along the lines of 70% enrolled in the bachelor's, 25% in the different master's programmes and 5% in PhD programmes. (Beneš)

While there has been movement towards more bachelor's programmes, the process is taking much too long. There needs to be a reckoning that will establish the bachelor's as a terminal degree. Resources should be put behind this idea and businesses need to be consulted or involved in the process of determining the goals and objectives of the bachelor's degree. The quality of the product should be adequate to meet the needs of the labour force.

Since the concept of the university is to prepare a person for life and work, a renovation or rethinking of the concept of the bachelor's, the master's, and the doctoral degree would seem to be in order. However, simply setting this idea into the curriculum will not lead to its acceptance until the recipients, the culture, and the labour force see the value in this type of degree structure. The problem seems to be one of presenting and showing the value of the product and not assuming the acceptance of the idea simply because it was deemed important by the state.

An alternative to the current degree programme could be to view the bachelor's degree as a step in the process of the long master's degree programme, in which an option point would be inserted allowing a student to leave the university when the bachelor's qualifications were met. This would permit progression into a master's and/or doctoral programme, but would also allow for an alternative that is

² <http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/socrates/erasmus/bologna.pdf>

³ Seminar at Charles University – Hanka Ripková – 14 November 2002.

currently not available to students who do not wish to continue beyond the level of a bachelor's degree.

An even more radical approach would be a long master's degree, with an Associate of Arts degree built into the process, at the end of one and one-half years, for those who did not, or could not, continue on for another one and one-half years. At the end of the third year, for those who did not or could not continue on for another two years, a bachelor's degree would be awarded. An additional two years would then lead to a master's degree.

Issues of curriculum development

One theme concerning curriculum development is the need for an effective, language-based programme to prepare the Czech Republic for its entry into the EU and to bring it up to par with other excellent educational systems. For the Czech Republic to meet the EU requirements and establish a system with permeability, there must be a common language base. Czech is not a common international language, so for study in the Czech Republic another major language of instruction is required. The most common language of international instruction in the EU is English, but too few courses are taught in English in the current tertiary structure in the Czech Republic.

Wilhelm, Kotásek and Spilková noted that knowledge of languages was particularly important for studying internationally and that the language programmes in the Czech Republic are not strong. For studying abroad, English seemed to be the most practical language, but German was also noted as important (Kotásek). Šebková noted that there is an international advantage gained by language, while Ripková observed, "living in a society with a unique language limits and will always limit the influx as well as the egress". Therefore, unless a more common language of educational interchange is established in the Czech Republic, it will be very difficult for Czech students studying abroad to succeed with distinction.

A lack of certain characteristics common to educational systems considered to be advanced was also noted; for example, the weakness of programmes in the social sciences, arts, and humanities. This is of particular concern, as one of the most attractive features capable of drawing exchange students to the Czech Republic is the country's arts, humanities, and architecture. Pehe indicating another example, stating, "students are not being educated to fit into the global economy". Thus, a question that needs to be addressed is how to integrate 'Czech-ness' into a global economy without losing the attributes of being Czech, rather than establishing the reality of being a Czech and then showing how different that is from everyone else.

Other common curricula absent in Czech tertiary education are a moral-based education, cultural diversity and problem-solving skills. Potential growth limitations exist due to the lack of professional training in general didactics and curriculum development. To a certain degree, this could be predictable, as a lack of funds

for education has been a hallmark of the Czech government.⁴ It takes financial resources to support faculty travel to conferences, to provide high-tech equipment capable of searching the web, to purchase adequate personal professional libraries, and to subscribe to professional journals.

Over the past few decades, an interactive curriculum has been favoured internationally over the older style of curriculum that depends on a lecturer speaking to a group of passive students. The image of the professor standing aloof from the class, where a student dare not ask a question or even approach a professor, has long since disappeared in the West. The labour market of today seeks men and women who have interactive skills, as well as an adequate knowledge base. The 'how to work with people' is just as important as the 'what I know about my job'. In addition to an adequate knowledge base, today's educated person needs the skills of observation, integration, correlation, and application. Being passive recipients of cognitive data will not adequately prepare today's young people for a global economy that requires integrative market skills. Today's curriculum needs to allow students to apply the knowledge they gain and not just to regurgitate words on paper tests in classrooms.

In addition to reforming academic curricula, there is a need to structure a strong and visible curriculum for life-long learners. This is important not only because it is a goal of the EU, but also because it is a noble goal of any educational system. Life-long learning should be a major theme in future curriculum development. Wilhelm noted, "It is hard to convince people that change is needed". Among the 4000 teachers at Charles University, the average age of a faculty member is fifty-nine (Wilhelm). That has a profound influence on curriculum development!

Consequently, it would be worth considering the idea of both faculty members and students being given an opportunity to increase the quality of their education with a programme of effective didactics, including a thorough understanding of curriculum, design, integration, alignment and evaluation at the tertiary level.

Instructional issues in the curriculum

Students learn best when they are actively involved in the learning process. Students instructed by the lecture method are denied the opportunity to become actively involved in learning. More independence is needed for students to explore their own best learning acquisition mode and in so doing to become actively involved in higher-order thinking skills, as well as actively participating in research to increase research skills and developing practical skills for use in the business community.

Little academic work is done in the higher domains of learning (application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation), and most of the work is concentrated in the lower levels of cognition (knowledge and comprehension). Often, students only think

⁴ The Czech Republic trails OECD countries in education spending. *Prague Business Journal*, 13 February, 2003.

to memorise and pass exams. There is no feedback, such as evaluations by the students and peer observations, for establishing the professional accountability of professors in terms of their instructional methods.

Professors are experts in cognition. Yet, knowledge is considered the *lowest* level of cognitive learning. How are professors doing at teaching comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation – the higher levels of the cognitive domain? What is being done with interactive teaching techniques? Research indicates that students learn best when they are actively involved in the learning process but the interviews showed that the passive learning style is the dominant mode of instruction at the tertiary level.

As a step toward the reconstruction of the Czech higher education system, a series of seminars should be offered to the instructors in higher education and a certificate awarded to those who attend six sessions; two sessions on how people learn, two on effective teaching and two on curriculum and design. An evaluation of instructors by students, peers and professional educators should be established (triangulation assessment). Professors who do not pass the triangulation assessment at a predetermined level of acceptance would be required to go through special training until they pass with minimum efficiency.

Student access to tertiary education

One of the salient issues addressed in the interviews was that of the accessibility of tertiary education. Matějů noted that the tertiary level of education is not open at entry point: "The system does not accommodate more than 50% of those who apply even when they pass the entrance exam with a reasonable score." (Matějů) This was also noted by Sokol and others. Because each individual faculty prepares its own entrance exams, there is no standard exam preparation, administration or assessment. This perhaps could place the university in an unfavourable light; one must trust in the total integrity of each faculty, since there are no apparent checks and balances in the system.

There needs to be accessibility for at least 70% of the students who apply, while now only 50% of those who qualify can get into the system (Kotásek). However, a larger number of students could be accommodated if the three-level degree programme were finalised and implemented (Wilhelm). One way of easing access to tertiary education would be to allow liberal laws concerning private colleges and universities. Since there are no current tuition fees in place at public institutions, and since private schools must charge large fees to remain solvent, private institutions could be a beneficial help by offering a certain degree of accessibility.

While the university structure has grown since 1989, the proportion of students accepted from among all applicants has not progressed proportionally; it has remained quite stable at about 50%, though the number of students almost doubled between 1989 and 2002. The demand for university education grew much faster

than the offer of educational opportunities (Matějů). Limitation to growth can be seen owing in part to the weakness of the Czech economy (Sokol). Growth has been slow but also consistent; therefore, access has been slow. Perhaps one statement can summarise this issue in tertiary education: "We need to make higher education more accessible to more students in the Czech Republic" (Šebková).

What should the entrance requirements be for students seeking tertiary education in the Czech Republic? This is a part of the overall question of accessibility. Since education is free as long as a student stays in school, there is a degree to which entrance to each level can hold special rewards and be viewed as a rite-of-passage. What is the best way to assess the potential for the success of those students who apply to go on to the tertiary level?

The concept of entrance exams for higher institutions with a higher number of applicants calls for the use of very selective procedures, and tests examining the quality of knowledge rather than the experience and grades in secondary education (Spilková). Perhaps of equal importance is not always how many students get into the tertiary system but rather how many students stay at that level. In other words, what is the dropout rate of tertiary level students? It has been stated that more than 10% of the 240 000 students in the Czech Republic leave their university before completing a degree (Beneš). Such statistics suggest that it would help to have a general screening test that would accurately predict the success of students at each level and in each type of institution.

The image of the educational professional in tertiary education

Low salaries often reflect a poor image in the public eye. Some faculty members' salaries are lower than bus drivers' salaries (Ripková). Czech teachers have the lowest salaries recorded in comparison to the West/USA (Kotásek). Kotásek also pointed out, "There is a change in Hungary where the teachers' salaries are being improved by 150% by law; that change, however, is not here". While Spilková noted that it would be necessary to increase the salaries of teachers by increasing the budget for higher education, Zieleniecová observed that the low salaries of professors represent a problem in deterring the good ones from leaving. Yet, Jařab indicated that progress in tertiary education would increase salaries.

The problem for faculty members in tertiary education is not money alone. There is also the issue of social status. Kotásek said that the new law on teaching relates to social status as well as financial status. Professors in the Czech Republic are not viewed by the state or by the public as important in the same way professors are in countries like the Netherlands or Finland. However, this is not entirely without justification. Since the educational system of the Czech Republic does not seem to honour diversity and does not recognise higher-order thinkers, professors are seen as mind-keepers not as leaders in directing the learning process.

While professors are paid by the higher education institution, the money is pro-

vided from the state budget, and the government does not put enough pressure on the quality of teaching. According to Matějů, young, competent professors leave because they are not willing to stay and carry on the fight for reform. As the salaries of professors are low, the poor ones stay, and the good ones leave or never come. As Šebková noted, "We need to get education up to the level of other professions". It was indicated above that the average age of a professor among the 4000 faculty members at Charles University is fifty-nine. The high age can be attributed to young people not seeing the field as attractive, as a result of the low level of funding – very typical of the Faculty of Education (Šebková). Professional educators are people who project themselves as not being of a high level of society. There is no way of returning to the days of Masaryk and the traditions before the Second World War (Zlatuška).

Issues of tertiary funding

Being under-funded is a major theme of Czech tertiary education. The financing of tertiary education is in need of reform. "We have been too polite in the past 12 years," stated Wilhelm. He went on to say that no more than 80% of funding should come from the state budget; the rest should come from grants and faculty activities. Zlatuška stated that the strings on state money are too tight and ridiculously strong. More specifically, Sokol added, "There is a lack of funding for fine arts and language." Zieleniecová concluded that there is a lack of financing and that there should be state funding, distributed to all faculties.

The strongest power comes from the university itself and they want authority without responsibility. Matějů said that they do not have the tools to raise the required educational funds. Universities are not state institutions but ones of public law (this was set in 1998). They are financed by the state, but the governing of the universities is autonomous (Kotásek).⁵

The issue of tuition was addressed by the interviewed educators as follows: Provide a new system of financing by 2003, based on tuition and loans (Matějů); diversify the sources of income tuition fees, using that as the key way to make finance reform (Ripková); a tuition system is necessary (Jařab); in addition to the issue of tuition fees there is the concept of funding, finances must be first (Ripková); financing must be improved and we must find other sources of funding education (Kotásek); the manifestation of educational reform as seen in the budget is important (Jařab); increase the budget for higher education (increase the salaries of teachers), and redistribute the financial sources (Spilková); as money is not needed in the same way for each university, all university financing should be based on per capita of students (Wilhelm).

⁵ For a review of previous funding ideas, see "M.S. McMullen, Higher Education Finance Reform in the Czech Republic: Transitions in Thought and Practice", *Education Policy Analysis Archives*. University of Pittsburgh. See www.epaa.asu.edu

Education is about learning – the transfer of cultural values and the teaching of moral values. It is about helping young people discover who they are and what their potential is and guiding them to become responsible citizens of the society and the world. It means they see themselves and others as capable of learning and it means they are equipped to live, work, and play in the world of today and the world of tomorrow.

Therefore, in a nation of limited resources, funding must be secured, not only through the state, but also through alternative means. Here are a few common ways of acquiring alternative forms of financial resources: the universities can lease some of their properties and can sell some of their land and buildings; income can be derived from the issuance of patents by professors who develop and create concepts that become marketable; international partnerships can be arranged, much as they have been, but with some necessary development towards fuller potential, and income can also be derived from the results of research conducted in the universities.

Perhaps there would be some value in hiring professionals to solicit donations from wealthy people, corporations and foundations, especially from those groups of people and companies who want to see a reformed educational system. This can be done both inside and outside of the country.

Issues of integration

The topic of integration is one of concern for Czech educators. According to Wilhelm, "Practitioners said we must have permeability with networking to adequately supply the need (for the Bologna Declaration)". There seems to have been very little progress made in agreeing to any permeability between levels of education or within the tertiary level of education.

a. Between the Academy of Sciences and the university

Perhaps the debate of whether research and teaching should be separate rather than merged is an eternal one. There are strong opinions on both sides of the issue. As long as the two are separated, the debate as to which of the two is more important and which of the two should receive the most funding will continue. The debate seems always to be drawn around competition rather than co-operation.

If the current model is maintained, then the two will remain separate, i.e. separation of research and teaching identified here as the Academy of Sciences and the university. Some claim the separation now exists simply because it always has been that way, and there is no need for change. Strong voices in favour of a merger come from Zlatuška and Matějů, while others see the possibility of the Academy of Sciences being dispersed among the sites of the individual faculties, where the two

would exist in co-operation. There would also be the possibility of adding instruction to the Academy of Sciences. The current situation is such that the two exist as mutually exclusive entities, which many feel need to become one entity with multiple functions.

b. Between public education and private education

There does not seem to be a great deal of support for private education in the Czech Republic. This could be considered a tragedy, as private institutions would be able to add a degree of relief to the current problem of accessibility. Minimal funding from the Ministry of Education for private institutions that meet state requirements could add potential for establishing an outstanding educational offering. A degree of freedom could be granted, as indeed it has been in some cases, to those institutions that apply for and meet the government's requirements for providing educational opportunities to a variety of student populations.

More opportunities for study that allow more selection from the private sector could enhance the credibility of Czech institutions of higher learning. Since the system is a non-integrated one, newer institutions have not become established within the state university concept (Kotásek).

Consideration might be given to the integration of private and public systems, since both exist on parallel tracks serving the same population, but are not permeable in their co-existence. For example, private higher education could be integrated into a feeder programme for late-developing students, allowing them to matriculate while experiencing academic success. If they do not succeed in private higher education, they probably would not succeed in public higher education either – unless there were provisions to empower private schools to explore innovative methods, find market niches and recruit high-profile professors and programmes. Therefore, a systematic incorporation by the academic leadership of private and public education could be a boon to the accessibility problem.

c. Between secondary and tertiary education

Since Czech tertiary education does not exist exclusive of the Czech public educational system, there is a need for a vertical integration of the system much like the horizontal one discussed in the two previous sections. In order to create an effective product influencing higher education, the Czech educational system would need to be reformed throughout. One of the common purposes of higher education is to instil in the young population the cultural values and mores which can be and are often seen as controlling the minds of the children. Pehe noted that changes in the educational system need to begin in elementary and secondary schools to enable students to be prepared and not be passive, to speak out and to interact, and he added, "we are already too late with this generation of youth to be able to prepare them ad-

equately for globalisation". Hoza stated that schooling is not given to problem solving by traditional passive learners in lectures. It should be noted that, as Matějů observed, the tertiary structure is such that it is not open at the beginning. Zieleniecová added that there were not enough changes made after 1989.

One contrast is Spilková's observation that primary and secondary schools are changing very rapidly. The lack of compatibility has caused secondary education not to be influential or credible for entry into university. This does not negate the previous description of tertiary education, and one can only hope that the changes observed by Spilková are for the betterment of the educational system overall.⁶

d. Within the tertiary level itself

Horizontal and vertical integrations are important, but nothing threatens success more than the lack of internal integration of the tertiary level itself. The current flexibility of programming is not satisfactory for students. The faculties at Charles University have not integrated their studies. Each faculty is closed, and there is no co-operating within study fields. A university should be a research centre as well as an independent faculty. Every professor should be concerned about people in the profession of each field: the researchers need to co-operate with other classroom professors. The interaction should be positive (Zieleniecová).

Ripková, Spilková and others also noted the lack of 'flexibility in passing from lower college to higher college'. There are too many 'blind alleys', like diplomas with absolutely no value. The Ministry of Education could eliminate the problem by re-defining schools and placing them in different categories (Ripková).

Spilková noted that there are serious problems in internal integration because faculties have great autonomy for curriculum development. National standards are missing, so there is no accountability. Spilková stated that because there are autonomous faculties everywhere, this is a very negative situation. Ripková observed that the Czech higher education is uneven in the quality of the different disciplines; for example, the natural sciences have kept up, while the social sciences have not (Ripková).

Wilhelm pointed out that the absence of co-operation between the university and other Czech private institutions has resulted in a failure to bring fields of study together. Matějů said that there is a notable lack of universality, and Kotásek added that the system is non-integrated. Jařab pointed out also that not much is being done to bring research and teaching together. Perhaps Pehe's statement best summarised the issue: Czech higher education is in a state of flux and searching for an appropriate shape.

⁶ For a review of the status of education at the different levels in the Czech Republic see the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, "National Programme for the Development of Education in the Czech Republic". National Programme for the Development of Education in the Czech Republic. Jiri Kotásek editor-in-chief. White Paper published in 2001.

Thus, some ideas to consider are:

- A. Study programmes need to be structured adequately and uniformly, providing easy and efficient permeability. The curriculum should include more programmes to be taught in English and should include an enlarged capacity in higher education institutions, especially in humanities studies.
- B. Research should be established within the university and at least two new research universities should be provided outside of Prague. Allowing private universities to increase would increase the number of degree granting institutions.
- C. Unified but diversified, simple but complex, comprehensive but limited: These are the necessary aspects of a complete system of comprehensive education. A factor often noted in the survey responses was a concern over the lack of permeability within the system of higher education – ‘too many dead-ends’ and ‘too many blind alleys’. All this may be tied up in the arguments over national vs. regionalised standards and decentralisation vs. centralisation. The reality of this, however, is often played out in the lives of the students, who suffer needlessly because the educational leadership cannot progress to a system that sufficiently takes into account the students and their needs, though this is not to infer that the current system does not see or take into account the needs and desires of students at all.
- D. The Ministry of Education needs to take action to see that ‘gaps’ are filled and replaced with a ‘seamless’ curriculum. This needs to be ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’, driven by leadership that knows and understands the nuances and ramifications of curriculum decisions. Curriculum design and implementation is not an easy task. To make wise curriculum decisions good research is needed, but to implement wise curriculum good educators (professors/teachers) are needed. A seamless curriculum is needed as soon as it can be developed.

The potential influence of entry into the EU on Czech higher education

Potentially, the entry of the Czech Republic into the EU could be the biggest boon to Czech higher education since 1348. It is inevitable that education and politics merge, since education is a function of the state. If the Czech Republic does not join the EU in 2004, the current educational goals will continue. Not joining the EU would not diminish Czech higher education, but it would limit the growth and potential of Czech students and professors.

The following seemed to represent the expectations of those interviewed. There will be a demand for higher standards: “The standards will be higher but some are already high, like in the sciences” (Ripková). Expectations are high for both student and faculty exchanges (Hoza, Wilhelm, Kotásek, Sokol). There is a concern for the quality of work and the transferability of credits (Zieleniecová) and EU accreditation (Spilková). Concerning the SOCRATES programme objectives,⁷ Jařab notes,

⁷ <http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/socrates/shorten.pdf>

"Czech education is ready for enlargement and becoming what the SOCRATES system advocates". Šebková also commented on the current EU programme expectations of SOCRATES-ERASMUS.⁸ Matějů believes that the EU does not seem to be interested in the research and development section of Czech higher education, so not much is to be expected in this area. Appropriate partners for the exchange of students with other EU universities will be expected (Wilhelm). Kotásek noted that there will be both positives and negatives.

Matějů pointed out that competitiveness is declining because the Czechs are too busy being Czechs and not busy being internationally conscious. Ripková indicated that the social sciences will have a problem with quality and with international standards, and noted further, "Living in a society with unique language limits will always limit the influx as well as the egress".

Josef Beneš, the Director of Higher Education for the Ministry of Education, is responsible for the alignment of the Czech Republic with the EU (The Bologna Declaration and corresponding process) and he is currently preparing for the Berlin Summit (2003).⁹

The Bologna Declaration will have influence on new thinkers more than current leadership (Kotásek). Kotásek goes on to say that there will be greater opportunities for study abroad. The Bologna document will require that the university align with a standard credit system. It will help higher education to be connected and it will be a wonderful, positive adventure (Zieleniecová). Hoza said, "It has influence now, as the bachelor's, and the Bologna Declaration, are both addressed". Spilková observed that the Czech Republic is starting to implement the Bologna document and Sokol stated that the Czech Republic was already aligned with it.

The Czech Republic must be wary of lowering standards by compromising in order to make money (Ripková). In opening the borders of the EU, one might expect there would be a 'brain drain', but Zlatuška says he has no fear of academics leaving.

What does the Czech Republic have to offer the EU? Zlatuška stated, "It has research". The Czech Republic can offer Central European culture, although the Jewish influence sadly has been diminished (Jařab). EU entry will be positive (Spilková, Zieleniecová, Matějů, Kotásek). "Every Czech should spend one term abroad," said Kotásek, who also pointed out the importance of acquiring English and German language skills, and indicated that the emphasis should be on a democratic education, of which the USA puts forth the best model. Wilhelm noted that students from Charles University are highly respected when studying abroad. Pehe mentioned that there will be contributions from excellent international educators who can come here to teach, while Jařab noted that bringing quality to teacher education is imperative. Spilková made an excellent point when she stated that an expansion of collaboration between international organisations will occur in order to find solutions to common experiences in higher education.

⁸ <http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/erasmus/what.html>

⁹ <http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/socrates/erasmus/bologna.pdf>

An idea to consider is that Czech universities should willingly become a part of the European area of higher education and push for more diversification, as well as promote more student exchanges.

The formal and informal educational leaders in the Czech Republic

Leadership can often be elusive and difficult to identify. However, it is important to identify the leaders in an educational system. If reforms are to take place in higher education in the Czech Republic, they must be led or supported by educational leadership. The Czech Rectors' Conference was consistently identified as the holder of leadership in Czech higher education (Matějů, Ripková, Sokol, Spilková, Hoza, Wilhelm, Zlatuška, Šebková). As Wilhelm is the head of the Rectors' Conference, he was also identified as being an important person in leadership (Zieleniecová, Spilková, Hoza, Zlatuška). It was noted that Wilhelm's strength as a leader is in his effective leadership in the boardroom (Zlatuška).

Another two groups were identified as having a leadership profile: the Council of Higher Education Institutions and the Accreditation Commission. While identified as leaders, they were also indicated as being very influential in their leadership capacities. The Accreditation Commission was identified as influential because it gives the expert view on a study programme, which is the necessary foundation for attaining accreditation from the Ministry of Education (Kotásek, Spilková, Šebková). Alongside Wilhelm, as the most frequently cited leader, others mentioned were Matějů, Zlatuška, Jařab and Sokol, and even the best solution would be if Václav Havel himself could convene such a group. Perhaps it could be said the commission could offer to the Czech people a lasting legacy of practical and workable solutions for learning and teaching in the 'new world' of the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

The current state of Czech higher education can only be understood in the larger context of the country as a whole, but it has been best described as being in a state of flux. Education is faced by a number of areas that need to be addressed, some of which we have discussed here, such as curriculum issues, instructional aspects, accessibility problems, funding and integration. Curriculum and instruction need to be restructured and re-thought. The introduction of and support for the bachelor's degree – both through resource backing and input from the business sector – as the terminal degree would represent an important step. Language programmes should be stressed, to give students the skills to learn abroad and embark on exchanges, and to prepare them for the more global context of higher education. At the same time, a highly interactive curriculum should be introduced, encouraging student participation in an effort to support their interactive skills, while maintaining the strong knowledge base, in response to the requirements of the labour market, which naturally also demands structures for life-long learning.

Funding and accessibility are also serious issues in the tertiary sector of education. Czech higher education needs to be restructured and more strongly and thoroughly integrated. Opening up to the emergence of private institutions would be a good way to help combat limited accessibility. At the same time, state universities should seek alternative sources of financing through their own initiatives.

Integration within tertiary education, between different levels of education, and between various educational institutions is also an important issue. The public and private systems need to become integrated and rendered permeable, while study programmes need to be adequately structured and provide easy and efficient permeability and a 'seamless' curriculum. Within an enlarged Europe, these measures will require strong leadership from within the Czech academic community.

The issues in this article are indicators of the process of change, as some points are just beginning to be addressed, others are continuing to be addressed, and still others are being brought to a close. Educational change can occur along with the passage of time, or it can occur through visionaries who set change in motion. The Czech Republic needs to bring its issues, resources and funds into focus, define its leadership and look beyond the EU to a place of leadership in European educational consolidation and reform.

BILL WELDON holds a Ph.D. from Arizona State University where he served for a decade as an instructor of education issues. His recent publications (2002–2003) include articles on How People Learn Best, Czech Culture and Business, Motivation: Beyond Power and Money, and Considerations for Higher Education Systems in Post Communist Societies: The Case of Czech Higher Education. He is currently a visiting professor and leads doctoral seminars at Charles University.